**Conflict with Science and faith**

Conflicts between science and religion <http://www.religioustolerance.org/scirel_ov1.htm>

**Why is there a conflict?**

Actually, science and religion are often not in conflict. Theologians don't care much about the tensile strength of steel when they have church buildings built. Scientists are generally not particularly interested in the functions of a soul. However, science and religion overlap on some topics. Each then generally puts forth conflicting beliefs on the same topic. The results of these conflicts can often strain the culture. cause needless suffering. and even generate loss of life.

Typical conflicts:

An early conflict:--0Perhaps the earliest known conflict between science and religion occurred in ancient Babylon in what is present-day Iraq. The priests had taught that lunar eclipses were caused by the restlessness of the gods. They were considered evil omens that were directed against -- and threatened the lives of -- their kings. Then, local astronomers discovered the 18 year and 11.3 day (223 synodic month) interval between lunar eclipses. This suggested that the eclipses had natural cause. The discovery did not affect the superstitious beliefs of the priests; they still regarded eclipses as a time of great danger to their kings. However, armed with an accurate prediction of the next eclipse, they were able to substitute a temporary king during the interval around the eclipse, thus giving protection to the real king. The substitute was killed afterwards, so that omen was always fulfilled.

A famous conflict:--Perhaps the most famous conflict was between Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) and the Roman Catholic Church, largely over the movements within the solar system. At the time:

The Church interpreted the Bible as teaching the geocentric system in which the Earth is at the center of the universe. The Sun, Moon, other planets and stars revolve around the Earth.

Some scientists taught the Tychonic System in which the Earth is at the center of the universe; the Sun and Moon revolve around the Earth; The other five planets revolve around the Sun. The stars revolve around the Earth.

Galileo taught the heliocentric system in which the Sun is the center of the solar system, the Earth and other planets revolved around the Sun, the Moon revolved around the Earth, and the stars were at incredible distances.

Galileo was tried by the Inquisition, condemned as a heretic, and spent the rest of his life in house arrest. According to an article in the web site of the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), on 1992-OCT-31, some 350 years after Galileo's death:

"... Pope John Paul II gave an address on behalf of the Catholic Church in which he admitted that errors had been made by the theological advisors in the case of Galileo. He declared the Galileo case closed, but he did not admit that the Church was wrong to convict Galileo on a charge of heresy ..."

Current conflicts: Two major examples of conflicts between science and religion at the present time are:

**Creation science & evolution:**

Many conservative Christians believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. Although they have are many competing theories over details, many conclude that a literal interpretation of Genesis in the Hebrew Scriptures indicates that God created the world during a six day, 144 hour period, sometime between 4004 and perhaps 8000 BCE.

Cosmologists have reached a near consensus that the universe is about 13.7 billion years old and that the Earth coalesced about 4.5 billion years ago.

Many conservative Christians accept a literal interpretation of the biblical book of Genesis which seems to imply that all of the species of plant and animal life were created during this six day interval.

Essentially all biologists believe that the various species evolved over hundreds of millions of years, mainly or completely through the processes of natural selection.

Beliefs concerning lesbians, gays, bisexuals transgender persons and transsexuals (the LGBT community):

Human sexuality researchers and therapists have reached a near consensus that homosexuality is a minority sexual orientation, one of three natural, normal orientations, mainly caused by genes. It is considered to be unchosen and unchangeable -- or essentially so -- during adulthood.

Many religious conservatives believe that it is an unnatural, abnormal lifestyle, mainly caused by inadequate parenting and/or sexual molestation during childhood; it is chosen, and can be changed.

Researchers and therapists have reached a near consensus that transgenderism is caused by hormonal imbalances in the womb; they often recommend gender reassignment surgery if the individual qualifies. Transgender persons often describe themselves as being female trapped in a male body, or vice versa. Many religious conservatives believe that it is a caused by gender confusion and is treatable through prayer and counseling; many feel that gender reassignment surgery is a very serious sin.

Webmaster comment: (Personal opinion; bias alert) Competing beliefs concerning the origins of the species, of the Earth itself, and of the rest of the universe are hardly life and death matters. However disagreements over sexual orientation and gender identity too often cause family breakup, homelessness, unemployment, profound depresson, suicidal ideation and even completed suicide. A real tragedy is that this conflict is allowed to continue without significant debate or dialogue between the two sides. One result is an ever-lenthening row of coffins containing the dead bodies of youths and young adults. I feel that the lack of dialogue exhibits depraved indifference by the two sides. They need to engage each other.

**Why do conflicts exist:**

Disputes arise because science and religion are two very different disciplines. They are based on different foundations:

Science is ultimately based on observation of nature. Scientists assume that things happen because of natural causes. Some scientists do not believe in the existence of one or more Gods or Goddesses. Others personally believe that one or more deities exist, but assume that he/she/it/they do not interfere with nature. In any given area, from astrophysics to medicine to zoology, a general consensus exists about most fundamental beliefs. Arguments among scientists exist at the frontiers of each area of science, where new discoveries are being interpreted and hotly debated. The debates are eventually settled by evidence, debates, dialogue, and consultation.

Religion is largely based on faith. There are over one thousand religious organizations in the U.S. and Canada within Christianity alone. By one account, there are 270 large religious groups in the world, and thousands of smaller ones. They hold diverse and often conflicting beliefs concerning deity, humanity and the rest of the universe. Many consider that their own faith is the only completely true one. Many believe that God revealed their faith to humanity in the form of sacred books; many believe that religions -- other than their own -- are all man-made. They believe that the consensus of scientists, and the beliefs of all other religions are at least partly false.

There is no simple way to resolve these conflicts:

Religious beliefs are typically based on faith. Most religious folks believe that, through revelation, God has taught them absolute truth. Any compromise with the beliefs of scientists would require them to reject their own religious beliefs. Very few are willing to do that.

Since different religions trace their beliefs back to different revelations from God, it is common for different faith groups to conflict with each other concerning humanity, deity/deities, and the rest of the universe.

Scientific beliefs are generally based on observation. Any compromise would require a scientist to reject hard evidence.

Reaching a consensus is generally impossible. Sometimes, debates are settled by a conscious decision to tolerate each other's beliefs. This is difficult to achieve between two groups who are certain of the validity of their own beliefs.

The core difference between science and most faith groups:

Religion vs. science conflicts have existed for hundreds of years and will probably continue indefinitely because the two sides have different concepts of "truth."

Most faith groups believe that God exists. Further, most regard a specific sacred book or books as either:

Composed by God and dictated to a human (as in Islam) or,

As written by bronze age, pre-scientific, authors in a tribal-based society who were inspired by God to write accurate text (as in the case of the Hebrew Scriptures in Judaism and Christianity).

The result is that Islam considers the Qur'an to be without error and conservative wings of Judeo-Christianity consider the Hebrew Scriptures (a.k.a. Old Testament) to be without error. They see the role of science as being restricted to only find out how the universe and natural laws that God created actually function.

Scientists assume that the functioning of the universe can be discovered through the use of the scientific method. This involves:

Collecting data about a phenomenon,

Postulating a possible tentative opinion about how a part of it works,

Testing the opinion to see if it is accurate,

Rejecting it if it is not accurate, and

Recycling the entire process if the opinion seems to be accurate.

Publishing the results in peer-reviewed journals so that other scientists can attempt to replicate the findings.

Often, this process will result in ideas that have predictive power which lead towards greater understanding.

After many cycles and general acceptance of the opinion within the scientific community, the opinion might eventually rise to the level of a theory, as in the theory of evolution.

Thus, truth in a religious sense means agreement with a particular interpretation of a sacred book while truth in a scientific sense means agreement with observations. Working independently, scientists and theologians might be able to agree on some phenomenon, but in practice it seems to ocurr mostly by accident. Sometimes passages in the sacred book can be interpreted in such a way that they agree with scientific findings, but this often takes some creative thinking and imagination.

**How the Public Resolves Conflicts Between Faith and Science**

by David Masci, Senior Research Fellow

<http://www.pewforum.org/2007/08/27/how-the-public-resolves-conflicts-between-faith-and-science/>

The relationship between faith and science in the United States seems, at least on the surface, to be paradoxical. Surveys repeatedly show that most Americans respect science and the benefits it brings to society, such as new technologies and medical treatments. And yet, religious convictions limit many Americans’ willingness to accept controversial scientific theories as well as certain types of scientific research, such as the potential use of embryonic stem cells for medical treatments.

Science and religion have traditionally, and often incorrectly, been viewed as enemies. This perception has been fueled in part by a number of famous episodes in history that have pitted scientists, like Galileo and Darwin, against the prevailing religious establishments of their time. But more often than not, scientists and people of faith have operated not at cross purposes but simply at different purposes.

Today the situation is much the same. Certainly, there are modern scientists who are actively hostile to religious belief. British biologist Richard Dawkins, for instance, in his best-selling book, The God Delusion, argues that many social ills – from bigotry to ignorance – can be blamed, at least in part, on religion. In addition, a significant number of scientists – roughly a third according to a 2006 Rice University survey of more than 750 professors in the natural sciences – do not believe in God, compared with only one-in-twenty in the general population. But regardless of their personal views, most scientists tend to view the two disciplines as distinct, with each attempting to answer different kinds of questions using different methods. The late evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould famously referred to this complementary relationship as “non-overlapping magisteria.”

But there are times when the “magisteria” do overlap. The debate over the origins and development of life is the most compelling example of this. All but a small number of scientists regard Darwin’s theory of evolution through natural selection as an established fact. And yet, a substantial majority of Americans, many of whom are deeply religious, reject the notion that life evolved through natural forces alone.

Indeed, according to a 2006 survey from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 42% of Americans reject the notion that life on earth evolved and believe instead that humans and other living things have always existed in their present form. Among white evangelical Protestants – many of whom regard the Bible as the inerrant word of God – 65% hold this view. Moreover, in the same poll, 21% of those surveyed say that although life has evolved, these changes were guided by a supreme being. Only a minority, about a quarter (26%) of respondents, say that they accept evolution through natural processes or natural selection alone.

Interestingly, many of those who reject natural selection recognize that scientists themselves fully accept Darwin’s theory. In the same 2006 Pew poll, nearly two-thirds of adults (62%) say that they believe that scientists agree on the validity of evolution. Moreover, Americans, including religious Americans, hold science and scientists in very high regard. A 2006 survey conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University found that most people (87%) think that scientific developments make society better. Among those who describe themselves as being very religious, the same number – 87% – share that opinion.

So what is at work here? How can Americans say that they respect science and even know what scientists believe and yet still disagree with the scientific community on some fundamental questions? The answer is that much of the general public simply chooses not to believe the scientific theories and discoveries that seem to contradict long-held religious or other important beliefs.

When asked what they would do if scientists were to disprove a particular religious belief, nearly two-thirds (64%) of people say they would continue to hold to what their religion teaches rather than accept the contrary scientific finding, according to the results of an October 2006 Time magazine poll. Indeed, in a May 2007 Gallup poll, only 14% of those who say they do not believe in evolution cite lack of evidence as the main reason underpinning their views; more people cite their belief in Jesus (19%), God (16%) or religion generally (16%) as their reason for rejecting Darwin’s theory.

This reliance on religious faith may help explain why so many people do not see science as a direct threat to religion. Only 28% of respondents in the same Time poll say that scientific advancements threaten their religious beliefs. These poll results also show that more than four-fifths of respondents (81%) say that “recent discoveries and advances” in science have not significantly impacted their religious views. In fact, 14% say that these discoveries have actually made them more religious. Only 4% say that science has made them less religious.

These data once again show that, in the minds of most people in the United States, there is no real clash between science and religion. And when the two realms offer seemingly contradictory explanations (as in the case of evolution), religious people, who make up a majority of Americans, may rely primarily upon their faith for answers.

* <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/4999924/Science-and-faith-the-conflict.html>

**Science and faith: the conflict**

A new film opening at the Cambridge Science Festival this evening attempts to demonstrate that the divide between religion and science is not as great as it has been portrayed.

By Richard Gray 11:31AM GMT 16 Mar 2009CommentsComment

Brain-scanning experiments carried out by scientists last week revealed that religious faith is embedded deep within key parts of the brain. This suggests that belief in a higher power evolved at some early point in human history.

Charles Darwin: the conflict between science and religion continues

Scientists argued that it explained the widespread nature of religion among human cultures, but the findings also highlighted a growing tendency for science to be used as a way of attacking religion.

It comes at a time when the gulf between science and religion could not seem any wider.

As the scientific community celebrates 200 years since the birth of Charles Darwin in 2009, and 150 years since the publication of his famous work that explained how life evolved on Earth, the conflict between religion and science seems to be escalating.

Darwin's own life could be seen as almost synonymous with the battle that is now raging between faith and science. As a student he joined Cambridge University with the intention of studying to become a clergyman, but found himself distracted by an interest in collecting beetles.

His hobby led him to become the greatest naturalist of all time. But throughout his life he struggled to reconcile his religious views with his theories on evolution through natural selection.

Today, many leading scientists who hold religious beliefs now face a similar internal struggle as they wrestle with mounting scientific evidence that forces them continually to reassess their view of the Bible.

The mounting debate over evolution and creationism has now left many people asking whether science and religion can ever coexist, or even if scientific research will eventually bring an end to religious belief entirely.

This week, however, leading scientists will debate the issue at the Cambridge Science Festival at the premiere of a new film that attempts to demonstrate that the divide between religion and science is not as great as it has been portrayed.

A growing number of scientists who also hold religious beliefs are now speaking out against the growing antagonism that is emerging between scientists and members of the religious community in many parts of the world.

"The perceived conflict between religion and science belongs much more to the current millennium than any time in the past," said Dr Denis Alexander, a committed Christian and a biochemist at Cambridge University (until last year when he became director of the university's Faraday Institute for Science and Religion).

"I think some of the polarisation of faith and secular society following 9/11, combined with the last US administration, goaded the new atheists, like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, to start a campaign attacking religion.

"Their strategy has been to use science like evolution in an ideological way by equating it with atheism. This has created unnecessary conflict."

The antagonism between religion and science is certainly not new. The man now credited with being the father of modern physics, Galileo, spent much of his life in conflict with the Catholic church.

His assertion that the Earth was not at the centre of the universe, now an accepted fact, was considered heretical and he was forced to recant his ideas by the Inquisition while spending the last years of his life under house arrest.

Darwin's own theories were both embraced and condemned by different parts of the church for implying that mankind evolved from a common ancestor.

Unlike the time of Galileo and Darwin, however, outspoken criticism of the church is no longer punished or taboo in the modern world.

Indeed, the most outspoken critic of religion, Professor Richard Dawkins, former professor for public understanding of science at Oxford University, has even gone so far as to describe God as a "delusion" and religion as a form of "child abuse".

Professor Dawkins attacks on mainstream religion and creationism have forced the apparent dichotomy between science and religion into the public consciousness. He contends that the existence of a supernatural curator is a delusion that can be scientifically tested and falsified.

Professor Dawkins stoked controversy at the end of last year by supporting a campaign by the British Humanist Society to place adverts on buses that declared "there's probably no God".

Previously he has expressed regret that many scientists choose to combine their professional lives with religion. In one interview he said: "Unfortunately there are many good scientists who do this. Although, I do not clearly understand their position in life, it seems to me, either they act like religious people consciously for some other purpose or compartmentalise their views based on the context."

The controversy surrounding the mixing of science and religion is such that one leading academic was forced to resign from his position as head of education at the country's most influential scientific institution, the Royal Society, after expressing a view on the way creationism is taught in schools.

Professor Michael Reiss, a biologist and Anglican cleric, suggested that creationism should be discussed in school science lessons "not as a misconception but as a world view".

The Royal Society immediately issued a statement clarifying the organisation's opposition to creationism and Professor Reiss resigned from his post. Many leading scientists have since criticised the Royal Society for failing to stand by Professor Reiss.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the public themselves seem deeply confused on the issue of God and science.

A recent poll carried out on behalf of the theology think tank Theos revealed that one third of people in the UK believe God created the world in the last 10,000 years. More than half said that intelligent design, the idea that a divine designer intervened in the creation of the universe because evolution cannot explain the complex structures of living things, was probably or definitely true.

Yet despite this apparent support for faith over science, most Christian scientists are very clear on their views on creationism.

"Creationism is not helpful at all," explained Professor Malcolm Jeeves, a neuropsychologist at the University of St. Andrews and former president of The Royal Society of Edinburgh. He is currently president of Christians in Science, an association of British scientists who believe in Christianity.

"I think Creationism is wrong and so do my colleagues in Christians in Science.

"You have to understand that the bible is not a textbook of geology or of science but is revealing something crucially important about God and his world and uses history, poetry and a variety of literary forms to do this.

"It has been possible to misinterpret the early chapters of Genesis so one has this very sad spectacle of creationism that is held so widely in America.

"As a scientist and a Christian, I regard this as extremely sad as I think they are misunderstanding the evidence."

In many parts of the United States, it is not religion that is under threat from science, but in many states science that is under threat from religion. Over the past 10 years the number of schools teaching creationism and intelligent design as a science has soared.

Dr Jennifer Wiseman, an astrophysicist at Nasa's Goddard Space Flight Centre, who is leading research on finding planets outside our solar system, said: "The emphasis on trying to perpetuate the idea of a conflict between science and faith is wrong and is robbing many people the excitement of scientific exploration.

"I am an astronomer and I think that by studying the magnificence of the universe, if you believe God was responsible for the universe, it only makes that sense of wonder and faith even stronger when you contemplate how many billions of galaxies and how many other habitable worlds there might be out there."

Most scientists who hold religious beliefs agree that there is little conflict between their research and their faith.

Speaking on the new documentary, Test of Faith, which was produced by researchers from the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, Dr Francis Collins, former director of the Human Genome Project and a Christian, said he found no conflict between his work on genetics and the fact it helped prove Darwin's theories.

He said: "Once you set aside an insistence on an ultra-literal interpretation of Genesis, you can arrive at a conclusion which is quite comfortable for me as a believer and as a scientist, that yes Darwin was right."

In fact, the future of science and religion may see theologians and researchers working closer together as they start to wrestle with the knotty ethical and moral questions that emerge as scientific research progresses.

Already religion has played an important role in drawing up the ethical guidelines that govern research on cloning and genetic testing.

For Professor Jeeves, the solution is clear. **"You cannot generate morals from science," he explained. "That is not what science is about.** **"This is certainly where Christians and other religious faiths can work with scientists to make the best informed judgments they can."**

* <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/does-faith-in-god-and-science-conflict-with-each-other/>

**Does Faith in God and Science Conflict With Each Other?m**by JACK WELLMAN · Print Print · Email Email

Does the Bible conflict with science? Does believing in science mean that we can not believe in the Bible? If a Christian believes in science does this mean that they can not believe in the Bible?

**Does the Bible Conflict with Science?**

The Bible is not a science book and science is not faith-based so there really is no conflict at all in the greater sense, however the Bible did reveal certain scientific facts about the earth before mankind was aware of it. For example, the common belief that the earth was flat was believed for centuries although the Bible clearly revealed that it was spherical. This fact is stated in both the Old and the New Testament: Isaiah said “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in (40:22). Revelation 7:1 says “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.” This fact was understood by the Old Testament writers long before mankind discovered that earth was round.

**God also tells us centuries before it was known, that the earth is suspended in space** in Job 26:7, “He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing.” Also early in mankind’s history, the belief that the earth was the center of the universe was widespread. This belief was called Heliocentrism. Psalm 19:6 reveals that the sun, the moon, and the earth all have a circuit, “It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.” Here is testimony to the fact that the sun has a circuit. Nowhere in the Bible does it state that the earth is the center of the galaxy.

**Does Believing in Science Mean That we Cannot Believe in the Bible?**

The above verses indicate that we can believe the Bible and that particular facts in the Bible are scientific, however the Bible is not a book of scientific facts. It is a collection of historical facts, theology, poetry, prophecy, and letters from the apostles. To try and force the Bible into being a book that is scientific is like taking a historical book and trying to make it adhere to scientific facts. It would be like reading Edward Gibbon’s The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and using it to say that history and science are incompatible. For example, atheists, skeptics, and scientists who state that the Bible teaches that the earth is only 6,000 years old are intentionally making Genesis into time-recorded events. They are extrapolating the meaning of Genesis 1:1 into a time frame that it was never intended to be.

A careful reading of Genesis 1:1 shows that there is no mention of time when God said that “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” If we read the entire event, we should take into consideration the entire context of Genesis account both verse one and two: “1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” You will notice that the earth was first, created. Then (and no mention of time was given here) we see that the planet was covered with water, and was formless and empty. The Hebrew word used for “formless” was the word “Tohuw” which means it was “formless” and in a state of “chaos”. The amount of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 is not mentioned. It could be millions of years for all we know. The event of creation is not intended to be a scientific account of it. It is intended to be a stated fact of history and an account that God is the Creator.

If a Christian Believes in Science Does this Mean that they Cannot Believe in the Bible?

After reviewing the previous scriptures, we see that the Bible is not intended to be a scientific account of creation; however it does establish particular facts about the sun, the earth, and our universe. It states as a matter of fact how man was created. A Christian can believe in science and in the Bible since the Bible was not written for scientists but for those who are seeking a permanent relationship to God. It is a story of redemption. The Bible is the greatest love letter ever written to anyone at any time. Science can not disprove the existence of God nor can it explain the origin of the universe. It is limited in its finite knowledge of the origin of matter and of origin of life. Science can only placate theories, hypothesis, and assumptions. There is no conclusive evidence or absolute proof of where the universe came from and how life began. In fact it takes more faith to believe that the universe came out of nothingness and that life came about on its own than to believe in a causal effect; a Creator Who is the cause for the effect of all there is.

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Sources

The Holy Bible, New International Version

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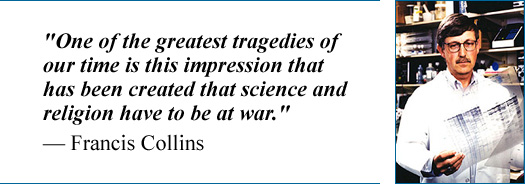
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* <http://undsci.berkeley.edu/article/science_religion>

**Science and religion: Reconcilable differences**

With the loud protests of a small number of religious groups over teaching scientific concepts like evolution and the Big Bang in public schools, and the equally loud proclamations of a few scientists with personal, anti-religious philosophies, it can sometimes seem as though science and religion are at war. News outlets offer plenty of reports of school board meetings, congressional sessions, and Sunday sermons in which scientists and religious leaders launch attacks at one another. But just how representative are such conflicts? Not very. The attention given to such clashes glosses over the far more numerous cases in which science and religion harmoniously, and even synergistically, coexist.

One person can be both religious and scientific.

 In fact, people of many different faiths and levels of scientific expertise see no contradiction at all between science and religion. Many simply acknowledge that the two institutions deal with different realms of human experience. Science investigates the natural world, while religion deals with the spiritual and supernatural — hence, the two can be complementary. Many religious organizations have issued statements declaring that there need not be any conflict between religious faith and the scientific perspective on evolution.1

Furthermore, contrary to stereotype, one certainly doesn't have to be an atheist in order to become a scientist. A 2005 survey of scientists at top research universities found that more than 48% had a religious affiliation and more than 75% believe that religions convey important truths.2 Some scientists — like Francis Collins, former director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, and George Coyne, astronomer and priest — have been outspoken about the satisfaction they find in viewing the world through both a scientific lens and one of personal faith.

This is not to suggest that science and religion never come into conflict. Though the two generally deal with different realms (natural vs. spiritual), disagreements do arise about where the boundaries between these realms lie when dealing with questions at their interface. And sometimes, one side crosses a boundary in its claims. For example, when religious tenets make strong claims about the natural world (e.g., claiming that the world was created in six days, as some literal interpretations of the Bible might require), faith and science can find themselves in conflict.

Though such clashes may garner print, airwave, and bandwidth headlines, it's important to remember that, behind the scenes and out of the spotlight, many cases exist in which religious and scientific perspectives present no conflict at all. Thousands of scientists busily carry out their research while maintaining personal spiritual beliefs, and an even larger number of everyday folks fruitfully view the natural world through an evidence-based, scientific lens and the supernatural world through a spiritual lens. Accepting a scientific worldview needn't require giving up religious faith .

* <http://www.cslewis.org/journal/science-and-christian-faith-conflict-or-cooperation/>

**Science and Christian Faith: Conflict or Cooperation?** August 22, 2007 By Robert C. Fay

Introduction

The popular image of the relationship between science and Christian faith is one of antagonism, conflict, and even warfare. By contrast, I will attempt to show that despite some episodes of tension, the overall relationship between science and biblical theism has been largely cooperative and fruitful. We’ll look first at the origins of modern science and the origins of the conflict thesis; then at the Galileo affair and the reactions of Christian scientists and theologians to the theory of evolution. Finally, I’ll make a few remarks on the complementary relationship between science and Christian faith.

**The Origins of Modern Science**

The scientific revolution

Modern science arose in Western Europe in the 16th and 17th Centuries. The events of that period are known to us as the scientific revolution. The first (in 1543) was the publication by Nicholas Copernicus of his heliocentric model of the solar system.1 Among the developments that followed were Kepler’s laws of planetary motion, Galileo’s telescopic observations, Newton’s law of universal gravitation, and experimental studies of gases by the chemist Robert Boyle. It is significant that the scientific revolution occurred in a culture permeated with a Christian worldview and striking that nearly all its leaders were deeply committed to the Christian Faith. Both Copernicus, an administrator of the Roman Catholic Church, and Johannes Kepler, a Protestant, were devout Christian believers. Galileo remained faithful to his church, despite the opposition of individuals in the academic and ecclesiastical establishments who were unable to accommodate his discoveries to their Aristotelian view of the world. Newton spent more time studying the Bible than doing science,2 and both Newton and Boyle were prodigious theological writers.

**Why did modern science arise in Christian culture?**

One can ask the question: Why is it that modern science arose in the Christian culture of Western Europe, rather than in ancient Egypt, Greece, China, or the Middle East? Though non-Christian societies made important contributions to mathematics and astronomy, none of those societies produced anything remotely like modern science.

For science to get going, one needs a set of presuppositions, or foundational beliefs, about the natural world. These beliefs include the following:

1. The universe is good, and it is a good thing to know about it. If people believe that matter is evil, they won’t be inclined to investigate it.

2. The universe is regular, orderly, and rational. If people believe that material behavior lacks order, they won’t bother to study it.

3. This order could be of two types. It could be necessary order, in which case we should be able to discover the order by pure thought. Alternatively, it could be contingent order, in which case we must discover the order by observation and experiment. Belief in necessary order is disastrous for science, whereas belief in contingent order is essential to its development.

4. Human sense perception and reason are basically reliable, and the regular patterns of material behavior are intelligible to the human mind.

These beliefs seem obvious to us, but only because we live in a culture that has held them for hundreds of years. Other cultures held quite different beliefs about the material world.

A number of historians have suggested that modern science arose in a Christian culture because core Christian beliefs provided the presuppositions needed for science to get started. British scholar, R. G. Collingwood, has written:

“The presuppositions that go to make up this Catholic faith, preserved for many centuries by the religious institutions of Christendom, have as a matter of historical fact been the main or fundamental presuppositions of natural science ever since.”3

**How do these presuppositions follow from core Christian beliefs?**

1. The scientists of the 17th Century believed the material world to be good because God had made it good. Genesis 1 ends with the comment, “God saw all that he had made and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Moreover, the essential goodness of matter is affirmed by the Incarnation.

2. The founders of modern science believed that the universe is regular, orderly, and rational because God is personal, rational, and faithful.

3. They believed that the order of the universe is contingent because the existence and behavior of the created world depends on the will of a sovereign Creator. The importance of this theological perspective, for science, is that one cannot deduce the behavior of the natural world from first principles. God could have made a world that behaved in any way he wished, so if you want to know how the world does behave, you have got to go and look. Hence, the importance of observation and experiment, an approach that distinguished the science of the 17th Century from the deductive approach of the ancient Greeks.4

4. 17th Century scientists believed that the behavior of the material world is intelligible to human reason because God has made us in his image and given us a mind with which to think.

All these beliefs follow from the Christian doctrine of creation.

19th and 20th Century Christian scientists

It is true that there was a decline of religious faith among scientists following the publication of Darwin’s Origin of Species in 1859. Nevertheless, Darwin’s work does not seem to have shaken the faith of the great physicists of the 19th Century. Michael Faraday, James Joule, Lord Kelvin, and James Clerk Maxwell, for example, were all devout Christian believers. In the 20th Century, the astronomer Arthur Eddington, Charles Towns and William Phillips, Nobel laureates in physics, and Francis Collins, the director of the Human Genome Project, have publicly affirmed their belief in God. Collins has expressed the spiritual wonder of scientific research in these words**: “When something new is revealed about the human genome, I experience a feeling of awe at the realization that humanity now knows something only God knew before.”5**

I mention the theistic beliefs of these leading scientists, not to claim that most contemporary scientists are theists, but simply to challenge the popular image of conflict between science and religion.6